/14 cont./

folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager. Their only musical instrument is the achangur, a balalaika, and even this has been borrowed (to judge from the name) from the Grusians (Grusian: chonguri). Abkhaz versification for the most part is governed by alliteration. Examples:

Varvultu --- barfuntu

Chilar marda qulardam

Arba arba sinarba

Masta mastarou

Masta stakhou

Siamul utsa

Siamul siakhou

Siandzhar utsa.

/15/

II.

Home-life of the Abkhaz -- Family -- Position of Women.

The whole domestic life of the Abkhaz is arranged so unpretentiously that all the necessary household articles, with the exception of iron things, are produced by the Abkhaz himself from materials which are at hand. The smith's trade, which requires a certain special technical knowledge, is left in the hands of special craftsmen. In every village there are two or three blacksmiths who will produce anything the Abkhaz needs from a piece of iron which he gives them. The smiths are highly regarded by the community and their craft itself has sacred significance in the eyes of the Abkhaz.

Trading is considered a shameful occupation, and the Abkhaz therefore do not engage in it, but if it were developed, the Abkhaz could sell many things at a profit. For instance, the Abkhaz women, who, by the way, are great masters of all kinds of home crafts, produce from sheep and goat skins the

/28 cont./

766 It is necessary to point out one more characteristic feature. When the head of a family dies and the sad procession has just started out for the burial-ground with his remains, a rope is thrown over his house; the ends are held by two people who pull it first one way and then the other. The meaning of this curious custom, which is also widespread in Mingrelia, is the following: with the death of the head of a family and the removal of his body to the burial-ground, the house begins to shake and threatens to collapse, and in order to avert this they have recourse to the rope. After the body has been carried out and the house remains undamaged, a rifle is fired as a sign of joy.

764 Graves for men are dug waist-deep, for women still deeper,
[562] because in the opinion of certain Abkhaz, women in general are sly and cunning (paivan), and the Abkhaz proverb says, "Don't
[539] tell your wife what is on your mind or she will crawl out even from her grave and divulge your secret." Therefore a deceased woman is buried deeper and covered with more earth.

When the deceased has been placed in the grave, it is rimmed with wooden boards and earth is poured in from above.

The Abkhaz do not have special burial-grounds. Each family has its own burial-ground. More often, high and mountainous places near a common road serve as burial-grounds. The tourist or traveler will easily observe that in Abkhazia the best and most poetic spots are occupied by graveyards.

765 The attention paid to the deceased continues long after his burial. The mother and the wife of the departed, his foster mother or her daughters, dressed in mourning and barefoot, visit the fresh grave every day, morning and evening, and bitterly bewail the deceased /29/ and beg him to assist them in various daily troubles, to intercede for them with other deceased persons, to give them their regards, etc. This continues up to 40 days or until the "Saturday mourning banquet." Until this time, the belongings of the deceased are displayed in the house and mourners as they arrive first weep over these belongings and then also over the grave. Likewise until this time, and often for the duration of a full year, a portion for the deceased is placed on

/35 cont./

776 affected man in his infant stage; no wonder the Abkhaz personi-
[194] fies and deifies all these, together with trees, woods, fields, etc.; he deifies some things because they bring him help, others because they do him harm. Accordingly, Abkhaz mythology created special protective deities for every activity /37/ of man, whether agriculture, industry, art, or herding. Some of these are, for instance: Aithar, the protector of cattle; Dzhadzha, god of sowing; Shasha, god of the smithy, and others. Many of these deities are female; for instance, the protector of the element of water, "mother of the water," is a woman; the earth itself is personified as a woman; there is also a "lady-wind"; the ancestor of cattle is female, as is the ancestor of nanny-goats; the god of sowing, Dzhadzha, and others are also female.

777 Besides these deities, there are the Ashatsa-chaphatsa, the
776 "creator" and "forger" gods. There are either two of them, or many. Under the influence of Christianity, they are presented
[194] in the form of angels. "Every soul" is born through Ashatsa-chaphatsa. They determine the future of the newborn child, his happiness and unhappiness, the length of his life and the hour of his death, and they make an inscription on his forehead (lakhints'ara /see foreign text/) concerning all this. The Abkhaz is certain that these inscriptions on the forehead exist and believes that anyone can confirm it with his own eyes. Incidentally,
777 let us tell an Abkhaz tale that illustrates the inevitability of
776 predestination or fate.

539 In the night two men set out to steal. On the way they were caught in a heavy rainstorm. They took refuge under the porch of a peasant's hut. Peeping in, they saw a group of women gathered, among them a woman in labor, who shortly afterwards gave birth to a girl. The "creators" and "forgers" did not hesitate to appear. One of them said, "The newborn girl shall become the wife of one of the thieves outside that are looking in. This shall be his fate." The second of the "creators" and "forgers" confirmed the words of the first. The thief, already middle-aged, said on hearing this, "I am not young even now, and she has just

/37 cont./

777 776 539 been born; God save me from such a marriage." And so he planned to kill the newborn baby; when everyone in the house had fallen asleep, he slipped quietly in, carried the child out, ripped open her belly, and threw it upon the flat roof of the hut. Then the two thieves went on their way. The child's wailing awakened the women, who found her, sewed up the wound with silk thread, and thus saved her from death. And no matter how hard the thief about whom the above-mentioned prophecy was made tried to find a wife, he was /38/ unsuccessful. Meanwhile the girl who he thought was dead reached marriageable age and one day somehow met the thief. He immediately fell in love with her and married her. Then it was shown how inevitably every predestination and decision made by the "creator-forgers" is fulfilled.

VII.

Prayers in Honor of the Deities

782 Prayer is the name given to those religious ceremonies and rites accompanied by sacrifices in honor of the gods which are performed according to a definite pattern set and sanctified from olden times.

[776] Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc. [787] The Abkhaz easily determine by special signs whether the deities' anger is the result of deviations from the fixed pattern [688] of the religious rites. To avert the wrath of the gods caused by omissions in prayers and sacrifices, they must repeat the offerings and complete whatever was omitted the first time; uncorrected omissions and mistakes in ritual weigh heavily as guilt felt toward the angry gods, even upon generations [755] far removed from the sinners. If anyone falls ill in conse- [753] quence of neglect in ritual toward one or another god, he must offer him a sacrifice in order to recover. If he is

/40 cont./

782 prescribes a prayer to the water, which is thought to be the
755 cause of the illness. Since the protectress of the waters,
[791] the "Mother of Water," is a woman, a sinless old woman is invited to the ceremony.

776 A large, clear, inaccessible fresh-water lake is thought
[778] to be the residence of the "Mother of Water"; she may also dwell in a pure spring, untouched by anything unclean, such as a pig, etc. The "Mother of Water" sometimes comes out of her dwelling to the shore, and at that time anyone may see her. This is how the Abkhaz describe this "Mother of Water." She is a most beautiful, bewitching woman; her locks are incomparable and chestnut in color; her eyes are laughing. The Abkhaz who has been bewitched by her talks
753 to his comrades thus: "Eh, brothers, I have been vanquished
776 by the 'Mother of the Water,' and from now on I no longer
539 belong to your society. Recently I rode into a dense forest and saw a table spread there under a big oak; a mirror and a lighted candle stood nearby; the 'Mother of the Water' was sitting in front of the mirror, smiling at her own beauty and combing her long hair, which reached the ground. My arms fell to my sides from exhaustion; I could not take my eyes from that wonderful vision. When she saw me, she quickly arranged her hair and came towards me. I felt giddy... Without a word she raised all ten fingers, asking me, 'Are you willing to be my husband for ten years or not?' I shook my head, but she would not stop, and with the proper number of fingers raised, she offered me in turn nine, eight, seven years, and so on /41/ of marriage. As I kept on refusing, she finally raised her last little finger and fixed her gaze upon me. I immediately gave my consent..." (1).

1. "Etnograf. pis'ma iz Abkhazii /Ethnographical letters from Abkhazia/," Konst. Machavariani, Droeba, 1884-1885.

755
782 The "pure" old woman who was invited to the ceremony,

/58 cont./

731 789 donkey is brought, which they cover with a white sheet and put the doll on it. One of the girls takes the donkey by the rein, while two others support the doll, and they set out for the place where the raft was made. The other girls accompany the procession on both sides, singing "dziva dziva dzvari! Kva kva mykryld aphsh-akh ipha did shivait dzy khychik, dzy khuchik," which means, "To get water, water! To get rainwater; a red daisy! Son of the Lord, we thirst for a little water, a little water!" When they come to the river, they take the doll from the donkey, put it on the raft, and, setting the straw afire, let it float downstream; they then try to chase the donkey into the water, which, of course, requires no small effort. At last the donkey is dragged into the river, and, emerging on the opposite bank, he begins to bray, which is considered the surest sign of forthcoming rain. If, however, the donkey fails to bray, the same ceremony is repeated anew on the following day or the next day after that.

[539] [825]

25.

Saints

776 778 [184] Independent of the general worship of all the deities discussed above, the inhabitants of the villages of Lykhny, Lzaa, and Ilori are under the protection of saints, to whom the churches erected in those villages are dedicated; or, more correctly, who are under the protection of the churches themselves. In Lykhny each family invokes the protection of Anan-Lykhnykh (the Virgin Mother of Lykhny), in Lzaa, of Anan-Lzaanykh (the Virgin Mother of Lzaa, i.e., the cathedral of Pitsunda dedicated to the Holy Virgin), in Ilori, of Tsminda Giorgi (the cathedral of St. George). To invoke their protection, sacrifices must be offered, which are, in fact, brought by each family once a year on a Sunday evening.

782 [796]

[231] On the day set aside for the offering, the best year-old

/58 cont./

782 heifer is selected from the herd, and in the evening it is brought
231 into the house where the family that is invoking the church's grace has its permanent residence. A supper is prepared, consisting of cooked or roast mutton, and the whole family washes and puts on clean linen. The head of the family takes a wax candle in one hand and in the other the rope tied around the calf's neck; he addresses the /59/ cathedral with a prayer for his protection and that of his family; he states that the calf will be dedicated to the church and that all its male offspring will be sacrificed to it, and that, instead of heifers, rams will be sacrificed. After this prayer an incision is made in the calf's ear; from this time on it is considered inviolable and cannot be used for food. On the day of its dedication to the cathedral the calf must spend the night in the house with the family.

782 If an inhabitant of one of the three above-mentioned
798 villages moves away, he is obliged to bring an offering each year to the cathedral in the village of his birth. Girls from these villages who marry inhabitants of other villages are not exempt from this rule. They as well as their children are still regarded as under the protection of the cathedrals of Lykhny, Pitsunda, or Ilori and are therefore obliged to offer sacrifices to them.

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●539 /A supplement on pp. 60-64, containing Abkhaz sayings and proverbs, is omitted in the translation; see foreigh text./

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When the woman places the dough on the hearth, she holds over it a pure *sulguni* (a round of cheese),[1] from the centre of which she cuts out a small round piece and places it in the middle of the maizebread; with the exception of this middle part, the maizebread is lenten. When placing the dough on the hearth, she scatters bits of it, first in the direction of the sea, and then towards the mountains; and, as if calling to the goats, she says, *reyt, reyt* (the goat call), and mutters the following prayer: "Thou, *jabràn*, the great part of the great god (*Àyt'ar intswakhwadù jabràn*)! Grant us the warmth of thine eyes and of thy heart. Be the guardian of our herds! Bear goodwill unto us so that no harm should befall our herds, except their old moulted wool and old dung!" Apart from this introduction, which is always used, each says an improvised prayer. After this is over, as if calling to the goats they again exclaim, *reyt, reyt*, turning alternatively towards the sea and the mountains.

When the maizebread is baked, and the goats have returned from the fields, the eldest man in the family prays to god *jabràn*, muttering approximately the formula quoted above. The whole family joins him in uttering *dämen*, and the candles are lighted.

It is to be noted that during the prayer the participants also invoke the "god" *mkyamgaria*,* and say: "May thy bounty never fall short on us." It seems to me that this deity is no other than the "Megrelianized" angels Michael and Gabriel (Geo. *Mik'el da Gabrieli*), with whom Christianity endeavoured, in vain, to replace Àyt'ar and his "parts" of gods; up to this day the pagan deities still take precedence, although they also pray to *mkyamgaria*.

The maizebread is first cut into four parts with two strokes of the knife, and only afterwards into small pieces; the neighbours are not forgotten either, a piece being sent to each. The maizebread is baked in rhododendron (*à-k'wazhwe*)† leaves.

2. *Zhwabràn* (god of cows)[2]

This rite is performed in the same manner as jabràn. The prayer begins thus: "Thou *zhwabràn*, the great part (of the great deity)

* The palatal or mid-lingual semi-vowel "*y*" in "*k'y*", "*gy*", as also in "*ky*", "*wy*", "*shy*", "*qy*", etc., met with in this article, lingualizes or iotises the preceding consonant sound, the combinations "*k'y*", "*gy*", etc, representing lingualized or iotized varieties of "*k'*", "*g*" (pronounced hard, as in "go"), etc. For the pronunciation of simple radical sounds see p. 328. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† See p. 131, note *.

[1] In Abkhasian *àtshyashwe*, pure cheese; cf. Megrelian (I. Kipshidze, *The Megrelo-Russian Dictionary*, s.v. *aut'ari*) *tsh'obro*, which is also an Abkhasian expression, denoting "pure (*a-tsh'ya*), good (*à-bza*)".

[2] In Guria this observance is known under the name of *boslobe* (an abstract form of *boseli*, cowhouse) or *ilorobe*; the latter probably has some connection with St. George of Ilori. The Gurians often call a cow *ilora*. In Megrelia the god of cattle-breeding is known as *Zhini-Aut'ar*.

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796 sacrificial maize-cakes. Also on this day, in the early evening, are prepared from the above-mentioned leaven many *à-khwazhwə*, and three loaves, made in the shape, respectively, of the moon, the sun, and *alaḫwara*.[1] In the latter are placed as many *aklakùt-s* (little wooden hammers, models of those used in threshing millet, or maize) as there are women in the family and an extra one symbolizing the desire for their increase. This correlation of the number of hammers with the number of women in the family arose, of course, from the fact that the threshing of millet was the woman's job. Soups of phasel and of fresh nettle (*à-khwats*) are also prepared. On this day no edible herb of any kind is allowed to be consumed, or used in cooking; *dsdsəm*, the Abkhasians say, that is, "it is not proper," "it is forbidden" (in Megrelian *vashiners*).

Late in the afternoon, when the cattle have returned from the fields, the prayers begin.

(*a*) *Antswà-ḫwa* (for God).[2]

The whole family gathers together. On the threshold of the house, *àishwa*, is placed a long and narrow table (in Megrelian *tabaki*), on which are laid all the eatables described above. Behind this little table stands the head of the family, and behind him all the other members. The wax candles are lighted. The head of the family takes three *à-khwazhwə*, and, addressing *Antswà*, God, prays that His favours and bounties may be showered upon his family, etc. The family repeat with him, *àämen*. These cakes are put aside.

(*b*) *Àyt'ar*.

After this the head of the family takes three new *a-khwazhwə*, and says: *Wa, Àyt'ar—bzhwàyt'ar! bzhyə-nɔ̀khak zənàp-yanà, bzhyə—tswəmzàk zxəkədr—dso*, etc., "*O, Àyt'ar—seven Àyt'ar, in the hands of whom are seven icons (to whom are subject seven gods), and to whom are lit seven candles,"—be thou the guardian of our herds! Multiply them so that we may milk seven men's load of milk! Let no harm come to our herd, except the old wool and old dung!* etc. The introduction, given in Abkhasian, is uttered by all, while everybody improvises the rest of the supplication as best they can, repeating the mystic number seven every minute. As is shown by the introduction *Àyt'ar* is the head of a group of seven gods. The number seven appears in many prayers.[3]

[1] *Alaḫwara*—a large mortar (Geo. *tchashuri*) in which millet (*ghomi*) is husked.

[2] *hwa* is an abbreviated form of the word denoting "he says"; cf. the Russian *govi* heard in the existing colloquial speech.

[3] All this, and the fact that the Abkhasians up to this day still pray to the moon and the sun, makes us wonder whether the septenary *Ayt'ar* is closely connected with the Babylono-Assyrian septenary of gods, particularly as the names of the gods *Au, Awa—Antswà*, and *Istar—Ayt'ar*, are very similar, while the moon and the sun are included in both pleiades.

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1796 *à-khwazhw* and entreats god *Alèshkintr* to grant the house faithful dogs—those best friends of man and reliable watchers of his weal; the prayer at the same time spills some of the hot *a-k'warəpà* or *a-*
[260] *k'warpà* (a thick broth of *à-khwazhw*, or millet) towards the sea and some towards the mountains, uttering "*Wootsw!* Burn out the tongue
[158] of the evil-speaker, the eyes of the evil-eyed", and continues his prayer.
[116] In the opinion of the commission, *Alèshkintr* is also "part" of *Àyt'ar*. *Ala* denotes dog; *shkintr*, however, is incomprehensible.

The commission explained that "dog" was mentioned before
[231] "man" on account of the former being more capable of loyalty to a master than the latter.

671 It should be noted that the common law values the blood of a
685 dog in proportion to that of its owner; the blood of a baron's dog is
825 equal to that of a baron, of a peasant's to that of a peasant, etc.

539 From the lips of K. Dolbaia (Abkh. Delba), an 80-year-old Abkha-
231 sian, who possesses an expert knowledge of the Abkhasian language, I wrote down the following tale:—

"In ancient times, when Abkhasia was inhabited by giants and devas (daevas), Aslan, one of the giants, would not leave the devas in peace. Once, when he was asleep, the devas crept up stealthily, bound him with silk laces, blinded and killed him, and threw him into a pit as deep as a well. On their return from their usual hunting expedition, his dogs discovered their master, but they could not pull him out of the well. They fell upon an ox-cart driver who happened to be passing by, and compelled him to rescue their master from the well and unbind him. The dogs licked Aslan for three days and three nights, and so brought him back to life and restored his sight." [1]

[801] The following superstition prevails among the Abkhasians. If someone, noticing the heavens bursting open, succeeds in uttering *Làri, vàri, khəzò, jkhwàri*, he will have all his wishes fulfilled. Only one woman was honoured with this great good fortune, the widow of a Mukvabba. *Làri* is interpreted as *lala* which denotes dog; *vàri*
[192] (*wàri* from *aowyò*,* man) as man; *khəzò* as whey; *jkhwàri* as the crust of millet porridge; uttered together they are supposed to mean "make me rich". My Abkhasian advisers repeatedly emphasized that the dog was mentioned first because of its unexampled loyalty and fidelity to man, his master.

1796 (*d*) *Àmza-noh̲wa*, Prayer to the Moon.
1796 The supplicant takes the moon-shaped cake and says: "Thou,

[104] * See p. 122, note *. According to Marr, the throat participates vigorously in the pro/uction of this composite or diffusive sound, and in a way as if the sound of the guttural "ɣ" (the ancient Arabic *'ain*) were also heard. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[171] [1] The Academician N. Y. Marr has kindly directed my attention to Moses of Khoren, who describes how by order of Semiramis, the dogs of *Araïs* (cf. *Alèshkintr*) licked the corpse of *Ara* or *Araio*, the Armenian Prince, in order to revive him.

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Àmza, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, guard over our men! Grant them beauty and strength!" Simultaneously the men-folk crowd around him, for the moon is the god of men; the women-folk stand at a distance. "Increase our cattle and all our weal! Burn out the eyes of the spell-binders, and the tongues of the evil-speakers! *Wootsw*, *Wootsw*!" the supplicant continues his incantation and, calling to the cattle, spills *k'uarpa* (*a-k'warpà* or *a-k'wərpà*) now in the direction of the sea, now towards the mountains.

"The moon is a man, and the sun is a woman," say the Abkhasians.

I will now quote from my notes the following brief account of a very characteristic Abkhasian tale:

(1) "Seven very rich Abkhasian brothers had no sisters; whereat they were very aggrieved. Eventually, however, a sister was born, but from that moment the wealth of the brothers began to diminish; every night some invisible power drove away their cattle in herds. The youngest brother who was endowed with the gift of prescience (*ashàna*) said to the others: 'A demon has entered our house in the guise of our sister; if we do not kill him, our days and those of all in the whole district are numbered!' The brothers, however, would not listen to him. Thereupon he left his home, and travelled abroad, where he married a beautiful maiden-sun (*Àmra*). After several years, feeling home-sick, he set out to visit his brothers. Alas! what did he find? There was nobody left alive in the whole district except a mouse and his own sister-demon (the witch). She at once devoured his horse, and stepped aside to sharpen her teeth. On the advice of the mouse, the moon-brother, to save his life, took to his heels; he managed to inform his wife-sun of his misfortune, who hastened to deliver him. But the sister overtook her brother and began to devour him. By this time his wife Àmra had arrived. She pulled her husband, *Àmza*, towards her, but the demon pulled also; and so a deadlock ensued. *Antswà* decided the matter thus: he allowed the wife-sun to have her husband, the moon, for fifteen days, and the demon to have him for the remaining fifteen days of the month. And from that time began the phases of the moon. As soon as the moon becomes full it means that the demon has begun to devour Àmza, on which account the moon diminishes gradually; towards the end of Àmza's life his wife, full of love, comes to the rescue of her unfortunate husband, and as her caresses and care restore him to life the moon waxes again. When it is full the demon reappears and the story repeats itself!"

(2) "The Eclipse of the Moon. During the eclipse a monster, Atv (*Àtwyə*), falls upon the moon to devour it. In order to save their

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539 [789] benefactor, the moon, the Abkhasians fire at the monster and thereby drive him away." [1]

(3) The Moon and the Sun. A beautiful Abkhasian widow woman had a son and a daughter, who often absented themselves from home for the whole day; they would go off early in the morning and return only late in the evening. No amount of coaxing or tenderness on the part of the mother sufficed to keep the children at home or stop them from indulging in their daily adventure, so she decided to shadow them. She found they were seated under the shadow of an ancient oak, in a thick forest, enjoying themselves in an agreeable pastime with the moon and the sun. Before them were all sorts of eatables. The mother, flying into a passion, flung fresh dung at the moon and the sun. The sun-sister, being a more fastidious creature, washed herself, but the less particular moon-brother did not do so, and hence arose the dark patches on the moon; the brother, the moon, and the sister, the sun,[2] then soared up to the sky for ever, while the widow and her children returned home."

821 Here I will also note that the Abkhasians always welcome the new moon by looking at its reflection through a mirror, or over a silver piece.

[753] A certain mainly infantile disease, similar to convulsions, is called by the Abkhasians *dmzakra*, i.e. " to be caught by the moon ".

(e) *Àmra-nə̀hwa*, Prayer to the Sun.

794 [796] When he has finished the invocation addressed to Àmra (the moon), the supplicant takes the sun-shaped cake, and, with the women surrounding him, he says: " Thou, Àmra, *Àyt'ar intswakhwadə̀*, the great part of the great *Àyt'ar*, grant warmth, and caress the women of our family! Increase our cattle," etc., and then spills *k'uarpa* (*a-k'warpà*) in the usual manner, uttering *wootsw*.

According to D. I. Gulia, in the village of Dchilou they use the form *Amera* instead of *Àmra*.

(f) *Anàp'a-nàga*.

[796] After that the supplicant takes *alakwàra* (a large mortar) and, addressing himself to the god *Anàp'a-nàga*, says: " Thou, the great part of the great god *Àyt'ar*, send us the warmth of thine eyes and of

[1] Exactly what *Atèwyə* denotes is difficult to explain. In connection with the above quoted tale, the etymology of this word may, however, perhaps elucidate its significance. *Atè* denotes the barn- or screech-owl; *wy* may be the root from the word *a-owyè* (man); consequently *atèwyə* may denote " man-owl ". And by *atèwyə* is, perhaps, understood the sister devouring the brother-moon. [795]

[2] Their gender is often confused: sometimes the moon and the sun are sisters or brothers, sometimes the moon is brother and the sun sister.

[3] I think the Georgian word *misezi*, cause, is derived from the Abkhasian *amese*, cause (from *àmsa*, moon). (It is doubtful! Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*)

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himself, by placing before the "icon" also the amount he was to pay to the opponent.

Muhammadans also take the propitiatory oath at Ilori, together with the Christians.[1]

There are many stories current about the power of the Ilori "icon" to work miracles. I learned one of them from the lips of Biram Tkhazou and Seyt Zhania.

"In ancient times the Ilori 'icon' determined all the disputes of human mortals in the following manner. High up in the centre of the church, hung the golden scales of Justice. Under these scales stood the suitors, praying zealously to the Ilori 'icon', who inclined the scale over the head of the righteous. Knowing this, Abkhasians would not venture to break the law or wrong one another; peace and happiness reigned upon the earth. But men are cunning; an impious Abkhaz decided to deceive the great Ilori 'icon'. He owed a neighbour of his a hundred *manat'i* (= rubles) which he would not pay. The creditor complained. They both went to Ilori. When they appeared before the 'icon', the debtor handed to his creditor his staff which contained the hundred *manat'i*. The scale inclined towards the creditor, thus acquitting him of the charge. He took back his staff and left the church. The Ilori 'icon' was 'offended' and because of this fraudulence on the part of one Abkhaz it punished the entire people: the 'icon' took the scales of Justice to heaven for ever."

In ancient times the Ilori "icon" provided oxen for itself on the eve of the wake festival. The Commission assured me that eye-witnesses of this miracle were still living in Abkhasia, but none knew their names. As this providing of the oxen is described by A. Lamberti in the manner in which the Abkhasians relate it to-day, I will quote the description from his work.[2]

"On November 20th[3] they celebrate St. George's Day. A superstition prevails among the people that this celebrated martyr, on this day, procures for himself an ox from the neighbourhood and brings it by night into the Ilori Church dedicated to him. This church is held in great esteem, not only by all the Megrels, but by the neighbouring peoples also. Therefore it is very rich in gold and silver[4]—the icons are all made of these metals and are adorned, too, with precious stones; and even the doors are mounted in thick sheets of silver. So revered is this church by all the people, that, although situated

[1] In Northern Abkhasia *Dadwrep'sh* is endowed with a similar power.

[2] A. Lamberti lived as a missionary for eighteen years in Megrelia (1635–1653), and, according to him (and also to other sources), the present-day southern Abkhasia (Abshua) constituted then part of Megrelia, the northern boundary being the River Kodor.

[3] The 10th of our (old) style.—N.J.

[4] At the present time, too, it is the wealthiest and the most influential of all the churches of Abkhasia.—N.J.

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in a distant country place and near the sea-coast, thieves have never entered there, nor has any enemy ship raided it or despoiled it of its wealth. Indeed, so highly is this saint (the Ilori 'icon') honoured, that not only would the valuable contents of the church not be stolen, but, even if precious stones were scattered *outside* the church, in its vicinity, no one would touch them. (It is the same even to-day, N.J.) In addition to the local population, this saint is also feared by the Abkhazes,[1] and even by the Turks, deprived though they are of the light of Christian religion. They all worship, and fear, this sacred object (the 'icon', N.J.) . . .

"On November 20th, the Prince (of Megrelia, N.J.) goes to the Ilori Church accompanied by his court officials, nobles, and the people of Odishi (i.e. Megrelia), to participate in the feast of the 'ox'. Not only do the Odishians go there on that day, but also the Abkhazes and Svans, in great numbers. The church is enclosed in stone walls about the height of fifteen spans. At its entrance are large gates surmounted by a beautiful campanile containing many bells. On the eve of the feast, in the dusk of the evening, the Prince, accompanied by a large retinue of bishops, princes, and nobles, rides up to these gates, orders them to be locked, then seals the keyhole with his own seal and returns home. The following morning, before dawn, the Prince, accompanied by the same retinue, again rides up to the gates. When they have assured themselves that the seal has not been tampered with, the Prince removes the seal and opens the gates. Within the Church walls, the ox is found. At the sight of this miracle, the people, with great fervour, offer up their thanks to St. George, and the church bells ring out the glad tidings of the miracle all over the country-side. Everyone is firmly convinced that St. George himself provided the ox and led it with his own hands into the enclosure. Also, it is said, the saint leads the ox thrice from the mountains to the sea and back, and offers the ox, thus sanctified, to the people as a gift . . .

"A long time ago, so it is said, an unbeliever (the Abkhazes say that he was a Muslim from Trebizond, N.J.) came here from a country many hundreds of miles away from Odishi. After witnessing the miracle and how the people celebrated the occasion, this obstinate man not only disbelieved, but began to mock the Christians, telling them that they were light-minded and foolish enough to believe anything. In spite of his attitude, the people tried to persuade him to embrace the true Faith of Christ, and unanimously affirmed that all the miracles of St. George were really true. 'Very well, then,' said he, 'I will do this. At my home, two hundred miles away, I have an

[1] In Ilori the Megrelian language prevails to this day; many, however, know Abkhasian also.—N.J.

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ox of a certain colour. If the miracles you talk so much about are true, it should be an easy matter for St. George to bring my ox into this church to-night; then, certainly, I will gladly embrace your Faith.' The condition was accepted. On the following morning, early, on opening the gates, there was found within the enclosure an ox which the unbeliever recognized as his own. Thus he was convinced of his error, and embraced the Christian Faith."[1]

(c) *Indl-qwùba.*

The *T'avadi*-s Marshania, and all those Abkhasians who descended from the mountains (Dsabalaa, Dalaa, Pskhvu, etc.), offer sacrifices (a ram, without fail) in exactly the same manner to a sanctity, *Indl-qwùba*, instead of to the Ilori " icon ". I could obtain no information of any kind about this " icon ". Everybody I questioned gave the same answer: *Indl-qwùba* is equal in power to *Dodòrop'sh* and the Ilori " icon ".

These offerings are performed early in the morning, and serve as breakfasts. Every Abkhaz slaughters some animal for the meal (the favourite one is a castrated goat), it is often prepared on the Saturday. They also pay the customary Paschal visits. After the midday sacrificial meal they all go to the public square, where they indulge in games, chiefly football. During Easter week they also organize horse racing, the most popular sport of the Abkhasians.

7. *The Second Day of Easter*

This is a commemoration day. A variety of dishes are prepared, all of which are placed on a table by an open window. The eldest of the family, holding a candle and a glass of wine in his hands, prays to the souls of deceased relatives that they grant his family peace and happiness. Then follows the pouring of wine on the meat and wheat dishes. The whole family stand behind the supplicant. After the prayer each member approaches, places a piece of frankincense on burning embers, and pours wine on the food. Here stands too a smoking pipe. All remain seated in silence, in order that the souls of the deceased ancestors may eat in peace.[2]

The Abkhasian, as has already been stated, have no Paschal greeting such as " Christ is risen ". They welcome each other with a kiss, saying: " May God grant us that we meet again next year," to which the other replies: " And for a hundred years."

[1] Quoted from the Russian and Georgian translation of A. Lamberti's *Relations della Colchide laggi detto Mengrelia nella quale si tratta dell'Origine, costumi e Cosi naturali di quei Paesi.* Published in Naples, 1654.

[2] This rite will be described in detail in my work *The Cult of the Ancestors.*

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they, therefore, take precautionary measures to avoid becoming victims of the malignant will of the evil spirits. Nothing is left outside the house, or in the courtyard; nobody sleeps out of doors. To safeguard themselves from evil spirits, the superstitious attach pieces of wax to their hair. Crosses are made from *a-lakwòmha* (Geo. *lakumkha*),[1] to which are appended acanthus leaves, and these are placed at the courtyard gates, house doors, the gates of the kitchen gardens and cornfields, the poultry and cow-houses, etc. Acanthus leaves are hung around the necks of the domestic animals. The Abkhaz is convinced that *dwyst'aă* dare not approach these crosses, which are also a protection against evil eyes.

During this night the evil spirits go out to look for booty, under the leadership of their mother, *Arapàp* (Meg. *rokapi*). On this expedition they are joined by human beings in whom evil spirits have taken their abode. Some of these evil spirits ride wolves or cats, and devour all the animals left outside by their owners who had no time, or had forgotten to drive them into shelter.[2] All evil spirits without exception stir abroad during this night; they wander growling from village to village and through the forests. For this reason it is easy to find out and catch them, and with this object youths go into the woods, where they make a large fire, using the wood of *a-lakwòmha*. The youngsters hide behind the bushes and watch out to see if they can recognize those of their neighbours into whom an evil spirit has entered. It is believed that the demons never pass a bonfire without stopping and warming themselves a little by it. Often quarrels arise on this ground, with unpleasant consequences. This custom of seeking after the evil spirits, "demons," is called *Awyst'aă lòkhora*, which denotes "the catching of the demon"; it is also known under the Megrelian name of *dchindchat'oba*. To this day an Abkhaz believes that an evil spirit can enter into, and remain in, a human body, particularly in that of an old woman.

The chief *dwyst'aă* is the eldest son of the sister of God, and that is why He, being a blood relation, cannot destroy him, although he may frighten him off with thunder. Here it will be appropriate to quote the following popular story:—

"At the time of the partition of the work between God and the devil, the former, exercising the right of seniority,[3] suggested to the devil that they should divide the world between them. The latter

[1] The Russian *krushina*, according to the botanists of the Sukhum Botanical Garden, that is, *alaternus* (R. Eristov mentions the plant *lakukha*, but he does not explain it. Ed. *Khrist. Vost.*).

[2] To safeguard an animal from wild beasts when he strays in the forest, they "bind the mouth" of the wild animals as follows: a pair of scissors is tied and a suitable prayer is uttered. "A sure remedy."

[3] The younger divides, and the elder chooses.

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agreed. During the night God caused the earth to be covered with luxuriant vegetation. Captivated by the beauty of vegetation the devil suggested to God that the best way to divide the world between them would be for one to have the earth and the other the vegetation. God took as his share the earth, and the devil received the vegetation. God then ordered him to remove his vegetation immediately. Only now did the devil realize his mistake, which, however, he rectified thus: he restored the vegetation to God, and in return for it he begged and obtained from Him the right to the souls of those who fall from the trees, having climbed them without first praying to God for their safety. . . ."

(*b*) *Barbanjia* (*dchiakohona*)

Before sunset on the 14th August the Abkhasian youths light, in their respective courtyards, a fire of flax straw (at present, owing to the lack of this straw, they use dry fern, etc.). Each person leaps thrice through the flame of this fire, shouting " I have burnt the evil spirit; I have burnt the evil spirit ". By so leaping through the flame an Abkhaz " purifies " himself of the evil spirit. After they have leapt three times through the flame each throws a piece of salt into the burning fire, and then, altogether, they begin to beat the fire with sticks to extinguish it, at the same time shouting the above quoted words. At the conclusion of the whole operation, the neighbours inform each other of their victory over the evil spirit by firing a gun. This manner of destroying the evil spirits is called " the burning of the demon " or *Barbanjia*. The denotation of the word is incomprehensible to me.[1]

(*c*) *Nân-ĥwa*

On the day of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, the " pure " (eldest) woman in the family prepares *a-tcha* (" a round bread stuffed with cheese "), boils a cock, and leads the whole family into the kitchen garden. Here they all kneel in front of the blossoming cucumber vine, and the eldest woman makes offering to Nan, saying: " the great Nan (*Nân-du*)! We who offer thee this sacrifice, established by our ancestors, humbly entreat thee to have mercy upon our house: increase it like the stars in the sky! " etc. The kneeling family repeat with her, *Âmen*. But no one knows who *Nan* (*Anan*) is; they only know that she is a goddess of procreation of the human race. Of the Mother of God there is no knowledge whatever.

[1] The Georgian equivalent is *Dchiakohona*, which is observed on Ash-Wednesday. *Dchiakohona*, according to Tchubinov, denotes " the leaping through the fire on Wednesday of Passion-week ".

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I quote here the following story: "A female slave of a family, being angry with her masters, took a portion of the dough for *akwakwàr* destined for the "god" *Got'anùa*, and placing it in a scoop of bitter-gourd (*akwapey*, Geo. *kopa*), hid it in the loft. As usual the family went to bed after the ceremony. But unfortunately for them the offended *Got'anùa* soundly thrashed all of them, using for the purpose the very same scoop in which had been hidden the dough destined for himself. This *gvari* makes propitiatory offerings at the will of sorcerers to *Got'anùa* twice a year, during the night before Christmas and before the Assumption.

Got'anùa, under the name of *Okhvàmuri*, evidently spread throughout Megrelia during the missionaryship of Lamberti.[1]

V. Deities whose Cults have no Fixed Dates

1. *Et-nòkha—Àga-nòkha*

The sea, like other manifestations of nature, has its own "part of deity", called *Àga-inkhwò* or *àga-intswakhwò*. An Abkhaz makes an offering to this deity when he goes to the sea coast for any considerable time. The sea deity is not to be trifled with; if it is slighted it becomes turbulent, it surges, and punishes the unrespectful. Therefore even the children are forbidden to throw pebbles, or to spit into the sea. The worship of this deity has been preserved in its purest form among the Bzib Abkhasians, namely among the peasantry of the Gudout (Gudaut) district, of the *gvari* of Amp'aràa. It has been described by A. Tch(ukbar), in *Sotrudnik Zakavkazskoy Missii* ("The Collabarator of the Transcaucasian Mission"), 1912, p. 373 sqq., where the deity *Et-nòkh-Àga-nòkha* is called *Et-nykh Ag-Nykh*. *Àga* denotes sea, *(a)nòkh*—"icon." But what does the word *Et* denote?[2]

2. *Àshkha-intswakhwò* (god of mountains)

Mountains also have "their part of God" known under the name of *Àshkha-intswakhwò*. *Àshkha* denotes mountain; *intswakhwò*, "his (of the male rational being) part of God." I have pointed out above that the Abkhaz often uses the word *nòkha* in the sense of god, which in the Christian faith is understood, or more correctly, translated, as icon. The god of mountains "governs" all the mountains and the beasts inhabiting them. Abkhaz shepherds make offerings to this god twice a year, in the spring when they drive the cattle to the mountains, and in the autumn when they drive them back. To him are subject also mountain game. In order to preserve the game from

[1] A. Lamberti, op. cit., pp. 148-9.

[2] This word manifests a consonance with the Assyro-Babylonian name of the god of the sea, *Ea*. Is this a mere coincidence?

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their enemies, the god ordered the bird *aqaqəb* to watch over them; the Megrelians who have the same belief, call this bird *kakabi*.[1] As soon as this bird sights at a distance a hunter or some other enemy, it soars high up into the sky, and by screeching warns the game of the approach of danger. That is why this bird is always found near the beasts.

The god of the mountains demands respect. He punishes severely those bold enough to bathe in clear, transparent mountain streams. The Abkhaz shepherds do not, therefore, bathe in these streams, being afraid of drawing upon themselves the displeasure of the god of the mountains: the nude body is said to defile the waters of the mountain spirit.

3. *Azhwèyp'shaă* (gods of beasts and hunting)[2]

Azhwèyp'shaă are gods of beasts and of hunting. They dwell in impassable forests, and lead an ordinary family life. To them are subjected all game, and without their will no one can shoot bird or beast. These gods kill for themselves some wild animal, boil and eat its meat; they wrap the bones in its skin and then revive the animal by striking it with a wand. Only after an animal has been resurrected in this way is a hunter granted the right to shoot it, and then only the particular hunter for whom the gods have destined it: no one else, try as much as he will, can kill it. Of this the Abkhasians are aware, and they employ the following characteristic greeting when they encounter a fellow hunter: *zp'zə-aakhəw yûzp'shùr*, "Which is destined to die, that (animal) is waiting for thee!" the answer being, "For both of us is waiting!"

A few words may be said about the way in which Abkhasians divine the success or failure of their hunting on the day of the Assumption. Before starting out the hunter takes a sharp knife and repeatedly strikes the table, cutting nicks in it. Passing his palm over the table, he says: "Whether thou sayest fifteen, whether I say fifteen, whoever says fifteen (it will be) thirty, fifteen." If the nicks thus cut number exactly fifteen it is a good omen; the gods will reward him with game.

The Abkhasians learnt this method in the following manner. A hunter once followed a wild goat, but he could not shoot it. It led him into the thick of a wood, where he saw a huge cauldron, around which sat gods. They invited him to join them. Nearby stood a goat. They killed the latter and invited the hunter to partake of the meal. When the gods began to throw bones into the hide, the hunter concealed one of them, putting in its place a small stick (or a small knife,

[1] The word is consonant with the Georgian *Kakabi*, partridge.
[2] The term is construed as plural.

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according to another version). The gods revived the goat and destined it to fall a prey to our hunter. On the following morning, on his way back, he sighted a wild goat, killed it, and to his horror and amazement in its body he found his stick (knife).[1]

These *azhwèyp'shad* have eternally youthful daughters, who often have love affairs with the hunters whom they reward with plenty of game. They select bachelor hunters as their object of love. One of them, however, once fell madly in love with a married Abkhaz; their friendship lasted for many years; often she herself visited him. One day, at dawn, the hunter's wife found the daughter of the gods, whose beauty was more than earthly, in the arms of her husband. The two were asleep on the balcony of the corncrib. A light breeze had disturbed the golden curls of the lovely goddess, and a few tresses lay in the dust. The wife acted in a manner born of pure love and sympathy. Quietly approaching the sleeping couple she lifted up the golden curls of the beautiful goddess and placed them so that they would not fall into the dust. When the goddess awakened she was so struck with the magnanimity of the beautiful wife of her beloved that she restored her husband to her, and forever forbade her sister-goddesses to have love affairs with married men.

Hunting is a sacred sport to the Abkhasians, and it is the custom never to talk of the hunter when he is hunting, but to say, if necessary, "he has gone somewhere." The hunters divide their prey into equal proportions; the head of the animal or bird, however, is given in addition to the one who killed it. Anybody whom the hunters encounter by chance also gets an equal share. Nor are the neighbours forgotten. Each goes up to the prey, and sprinkling it and also the successful hunter with some grain, says: "May gods grant thee a better one on another occasion!"

Any kind of falsehood or evasion of the rules of hunting consecrated by custom is severely punished by order from above. The following story may be quoted as an illustration of this:—

A well-known hunter once killed a wild goat, and another hunter, having heard a shot, ran up to him. The successful hunter said: "Behind that corner there is hiding another goat which you can easily follow up; it will be better to take home a kill each than to divide one between." The second hunter ran in the direction indicated but found no goat there. For this lie the gods punished not only the hunter himself but also his whole *gvari*; they have never since shot a single head of game.

[1] This story is written down from the words of A. Kardava, a Megrelian shepherd. In his version the wild boar figures instead of the goat, and *tqashi-mep'e*, king of the woods, instead of *Azhwèyp'shad*.

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4. *Abna-intswakhwə* (god of the woods)

The woods also have their "part of deity", *Abna-intswakhwə*. *Abna* denotes wood, forest; *intswakhwə* we already know. When an Abkhaz enters a forest, or if he has to pass a night there, he prays to this deity for protection. I have, however, failed to collect more information about this god of the woods.

Abna-wowyə

In ancient times the forests of Abkhasia were inhabited by *Abna-wowyə*, "forest-people." *Abna* denotes forest, and *a-wowyə*, man. They were strong and courageous, but very ugly in appearance. Their bodies were covered with bristle-like hair. From their breasts projected a strange object, shaped like an axe and strong as steel, which served as a weapon; and by pressing an enemy to their breasts they could cut him into two. They preyed incessantly upon the people, who, however, in the long run, and with God's help, destroyed them. The last of them dwelt in an impassable forest, called Urak', near the village of Adzvibzha. In the same forest there lived also the courageous Khukhw Dchit'anàă, with his herd. Between Khukhw and this "forest-man" there was intense animosity. The ugly "forest-man" would come to Khukhw's hut every midnight, and inquire: "Dchit'anàă Khukhw,[1] art thou at home?" "Yes, I am. If thou art not an old woman come and fight me," responded the fearless Abkhaz. The "forest-man", however, would never agree to a single combat. Khukhw, tired at last of these childish pranks, resorted to a ruse. Placing a log in his bed, he went outside and hid behind a bush not far from the hut. At midnight the "forest-man" came as usual, and receiving no reply, he concluded that Khukhw was soundly asleep. Entering the hut and seeing, as he thought, the sleeping form of his enemy, he was about to aim a blow at the log, when the Abkhaz, who had crept in unawares, fired a shot at him. The "forest-man", although mortally wounded, managed to crawl away, and on the following morning Khukhw followed up the blood-stained footprints, and finding the dead body of his enemy, buried him with due honours. Khukhw appropriated the wealth of the last "forest-man", and also married his beautiful wife. . . .

5. *Atswaqwə*, the rainbow

The god of the rainbow is very vindictive; he soars high in the clouds and punishes, either by death or the infliction of disease, all

[1] A peculiarity of the Abkhasian: the surname precedes the Christian name.